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Exclusive Interview with Punjabi Taliban Leader Maulana Asmatullah Muoaviya – Part 1 (January 2012)

Flashpoint Global Partners has obtained an exclusive interview with Punjabi Taliban leader Maulana Asmatullah Muoaviya. In the interview, he provides insight on his background, the goals of the Punjabi Taliban, and the Punjabi Taliban's stance on drone strikes, as well as the ISI and MI. He explained, "After the tragedy of Lal Masjid, I, along with hundreds of our friends, came to the tribal areas and today, our organization has a presence in all four provinces of the country, including in the northern areas and Azad Kashmir. As you know, the PT is active in the entire country and operates as part of the TTP. Our war, our struggle and our sacrifices are for defense of our motherland Pakistan and for the glory of Islam. We aim at ridding this country of feudalism, dictatorship and a cruel system and replacing it with Islamic rule. To achieve this goal, we chose to take up arms." He continued, "So as much as the US is responsible for the drone attacks, the ISI, MI and other intelligence agencies of Pakistan are equally assisting the US in these attacks." He further noted, "We believe that RAW is one side of the coin while the other is ISI."

Interviewer (Int): "We are at an undisclosed location in South Waziristan, where we came across the head of Punjabi Taliban, an affiliate of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Following his introduction, we'll also be putting some questions to him to answer."

Maulana Asmatullah Muoaviya (MAM): "You know me by the name of Maulana Asmatullah Muoaviya and as the central leader of the Punjabi Taliban (PT). I am making effort to promote this case by the name of 'Janod ul Hafsa' (JH)."

Int: "When did JH come into being, what is it's numerical strength, in which parts of the country is it operational, and what is the aim its wants to achieve through these operations?"

MAM: "After the 9/11 incident, Pakistan brought drastic changes to its foreign policy and Pakistani generals and Pakistani rulers...practically used the Pakistani armed forces as a rented army for the US."

"So naturally, our sentiments were hurt and we felt bound to answer the call of Shariah in this regard. But, we wished that Pakistani rulers and generals shed this attitude, which they did not and continued with their operations until they attacked Damadola, where 80 students were killed. Then again, they attacked Lal Masjid in July 2007."

"I was then affiliated with Jaish-e-Muhammad, which I left after this incident and came here. We strengthened our organization here in the tribal areas and affiliated ourselves with Baitullah Mehsud Shaheed."

“So our movement is the continuation of the sacrifices made by the girl students of Jamia Hafsa for the rule of Shariah in Pakistan. When the government of Pakistan refused us a peaceful mean to implement Shariah as the supreme law of the land, we were forced to adopt the alternative, that the Shariah directs us to follow.”

“After the tragedy of Lal Masjid, I, along with hundreds of our friends, came to the tribal areas and today, our organization has a presence in all four provinces of the country, including in the northern areas and Azad Kashmir. As you know, the PT is active in the entire country and operates as part of the TTP. Our war, our struggle and our sacrifices are for defense of our motherland Pakistan and for the glory of Islam. We aim at ridding this country of feudalism, dictatorship and a cruel system and replace it with Islamic rule. To achieve this goal, we chose to take up arms.”

Int: “How true are the rumors that Taliban are supported by the (security) agencies.”

MAM: “My humble submission is that be it ISI or MI, these are our primary targets. They handed over 600 of our foreigner colleagues to the US and these figures are for the tenure of President Musharraf, which continues till date. Who ever they can lay hands to, for example very recently, Umar Patik was arrested from Abbotabad and his wife was stripped and put into a vehicle. Similarly, they detained an Arab Mujahid in Quetta- an Al-Qaeda leader- and handed him over to the US.”

“So both ISI and MI are still working for the outsiders. Our fight is against the US and whoever joins hands with them. So, the ISI, against whom we have been operating and recently we attacked one of its office in Hamza Camp; and similarly, Mujahideen's attack in RA Bazaar in Rawalpindi was also directed against the ISI. Also, very recently in Lahore, an attack in Pir Chamble that left a colonel, a major and three other officials of the MI dead besides several other attacks in Karachi.”

“So in most of these case, it the ISI and the MI that we attack as we believe that as long as they shed their support to the US, they deserve this. Some people even say we are attacking them (ISI, MI) at the behest of RAW (Indian Intelligence agency) and Mossad (Israeli Intelligence Agency). I would tell them that we do not discriminate between RAW, Mossad and these agencies. We believe that RAW is one side of the coin while the other is ISI.”

“Basically, their birth, existence and growth is based on anti-Islam sentiments and now the ISI and MI are doing the same. If they really introduce themselves as an Islamic organization and stand against the US and pull itself out of the War of Terror and American block, they will no longer be our target. But as long as they hurdle imposition of Islamic rule in the country and continue arresting our Arab as well as non-Arab friends and handing them over to the US, the ISI and MI will continue to be our targets

as are Mossad and CIA, because these days, the former are serving as the frontline of the former and obviously, it's the frontline that suffers the most in a war."

"So to such accusations that we are doing this on the behest of some foreign agencies, with the grace of Allah, those fighting for the will of Allah don't operate at the behest of anyone. They are only slaves to Allah and Allah only."

Int: "A similar question on this is that what are the reasons behind the attacks on ISI and MI."

MAM: "We have decided a target for ourselves, which is Allah's law on Allah's Land. We want Islamic rule and whatever the obstacle, we will face it. We see the US as the major obstacle, which is the breeding ground for dictatorial and cruel systems in the world so we directed our attention towards the US after Russia."

"Now hurdles like ISI and MI, who have decided to join them, are our natural targets. (Recites something, which I am not sure if it's from Quran or Hadith) translation: Fight against the nearest hurdles. So currently, US is a later issue, we first need to clear the hurdle of ISI and MI. If they agree to our belief, which is in fact the basic reason for the creation of Pakistan, to implement Shariah law in the country, we would have no reason to fight ISI and MI."

"MI's officials are all from our cities and streets and are our friends. Everything will return to normal as we are not fighting against faces but against a system and ideology. We are fighting against a hurdle against the rule of Allah and whoever that hurdle is, be it one of us or from outside, we consider him as an enemy, be it ISI, MI, CIA or FIA, whoever. We consider them as one unit."

Int: "You have come to live in South Waziristan, where drones hover over your head and there are reports that it might force you to leave this area."

MAM: "This is the enemy's wish that will never see light of the day. We chose this path not because we wanted an easy life but to make sacrifices. Then, when we chose to live this way, why should we be frightened by drone. You said something and I would like to answer something similar."

"There is a unique perception in Pakistan regarding the drones. You can hear the drone up there and I am sitting with a journalist answering his questions. Do you see any signs on my face that suggest I am worried about it? If I am sweating or if there are some other problems in my behavior?"

"A journalist is supposed to take note of the body language as well and if you notice anything of the sort while talking to me or my colleagues around me here, you can say so."

“The enemy is just trying to engage us in psychological war while our mission starts with the desire for making sacrifices. So we are not afraid of these drones and will continue our struggle. Drones did not break our resolve, it rather strengthened it. Earlier, if we have 200 to 400 companions, today praise be to Allah, they are in thousands. If our mission was restricted to Madrassas, it is now active in colleges and universities, if our approach was until a few cities, it has now been extended to every city of the country.”

“Today, we can let the government know in advance about the date and timing of an attack and can successfully carry it out too. So drones did not affect us adversely, though it took away from us our greatest asset (Baitullah Mehsud). But everyone has to die on a specific time and so did he. But it rather strengthened our resolve.”

Int: “Another question related to drone, which is who do you think has the most interest in the drone attacks or is it just US doing it by its own.”

MAM: “It is...propaganda of the US and its cronies, who wants to influence the minds of the people too, that drone was unstoppable, and that no country can bring it down or something that can win the war for US. If this was the case, they would have won the Iraq war; there would have been no movement in Yemen and Somalia to start with, but it's very much there.”

“As far as Pakistan is concerned, you hear that it was just Shamsi Airbase used for drone attacks, which is not the case. Kamra Airbase and Shehbaz Airbase are used for drones too. But the real issue is the ground support. Drones do hover around here and the government does issue statements for the sake of it. If they wanted it to stop, they could have fired a missile at it and there would have been no drones, but they do not want this.”

“But the real issue is that after detaining a number of spies in the tribal area, we have come to know that it was some kind of infrared rays directed against a target [that] guides drones to execute attack. So the question is, who does this? We detained several US spies and none of those told us that it was American CIA or FIA that provided him the device. Only five percent of the attacks were tipped off by Afghan spies, who were provided chips from Afghanistan. While 95 percent of the spies were given the devices and sent by...ISI and MI.”

“This is why, when there are problems in relationship between the US and Pakistan, the drone attacks stop. When there was the Raymond Davis issue, the drone attacks stopped, because Pakistan stops its spies from planting those devices.”

“It's now more than a month and a half that no drone attack has been carried out because there is tension between Pakistan and the US. So it is evident that until Pakistan provides its ground support, US cannot carry out drone attacks.”

“So as much as the US is responsible for the drone attacks, the ISI, MI and other intelligence agencies of Pakistan are equally assisting the US in these attacks.”

Int: “Our audience is also of the view that the devices you are talking about do not exist and the people you accuse of spying are all innocent. If they were indeed spies, they would have been brought in public (according to tribal tradition), brought evidence against them and proved guilty.”

MAM: “As far as the devices are concerned, mujahideen have released 3 to 4 videos of the device from 2 or 3 of our studios and we can provide those to you. The videos explain the nature of devices and their usage and has also made the video available to the media as well. The infrared rays could be seen through night-vision cameras.”

“So it's not something hidden and the device is very much there. As of bringing and proving them guilty in the public, there are some set procedures of the mujahideen, which they follow. If you bring in such a person in public, it brings disgrace to the family as well as the tribe;...mujahideen do not want to disgrace the entire tribe because of one person.”

“For this purpose, there is a committee that handles such issues, which consists of Ulema and other knowledgeable people. They scrutinize the evidence against an accused and decide according to Shariah. Also, it's not true that every accused is executed. Many are set free when there is not enough proof against them.”

“Those executed were proved guilty and their videos were also recorded. It is never so that we would kill our own brothers without any sin. Jihad is basically meant to protect Muslims, not to kill or terrorize them. Only those who sell themselves to American dollars get killed.”